

9:29 [And] fight against those who – despite having been vouchsafed revelation [aforetime]⁴⁰ – do not [truly] believe either in God or the Last Day, and do not consider forbidden that which God and His Apostle have forbidden,⁴¹ and do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them]⁴² till they [agree to] pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled [in war].⁴³

⁴⁰ Lit., “such of those who were vouchsafed revelation [aforetime] as do not believe...”, etc. In accordance with the fundamental principle – observed throughout my interpretation of the Qur’ān – that all of its statements and ordinances are mutually complementary and cannot, therefore, be correctly understood unless they are considered as parts of one integral whole, this verse, too must be read in the context of the clear-cut Qur’ānic rule that war is permitted only in self-defence (see 2:190–194, and the corresponding notes). In other words, the above injunction to fight is relevant only in the event of aggression committed against the Muslim community or state, or in the presence of an unmistakable threat to its security: a view which has been shared by that great Islamic thinker, Muḥammad ‘Abduh. Commenting on this verse, he declared: “Fighting has been made obligatory in Islam only for the sake of defending the truth and its followers... All the campaigns of the Prophet were defensive in character; and so were the wars undertaken by the Companions in the earliest period [of Islam]” (*Manār* x, 332).

⁴¹ This, to my mind, is the key-phrase of the above ordinance. The term “apostle” is obviously used here in its generic sense and applies to all the prophets on whose teachings the beliefs of the Jews and the Christians are supposed to be based – in particular, to Moses and (in the case of the Christians) to Jesus as well (*Manār* x, 333 and 337). Since, earlier in this sentence, the people alluded to are accused of so grave a sin as wilfully refusing to believe in God and the Last Day (i.e., in life after death and man’s individual responsibility for his doings on earth), it is inconceivable that they should subsequently be blamed for comparatively minor offences against their religious law: consequently, the stress on their “not forbidding that which God and His apostle have forbidden” must refer to something which is as grave, or almost as grave, as disbelief in God. In the context of an ordinance enjoining war against them, this “something” can mean only one thing – namely, unprovoked aggression: for it is this that has been forbidden by God through all the apostles who were entrusted with conveying His message to man. Thus, the above verse must be understood as a call to the believers to fight against such – and only such – of the nominal followers of earlier revelation as deny their own professed beliefs by committing aggression against the followers of the Qur’ān (cf. *Manār* x, 338).

⁴² See in this connection the statement (in 5:13–14) that the Jews and the Christians “have forgotten much of what they had been told to bear in mind”.

43 Sc., “and having become incorporated in the Islamic state”. The term *jizyah*, rendered by me as “exemption tax”, occurs in the Qur’ān only once, but its meaning and purpose have been fully explained in many authentic Traditions. It is intimately bound up with the concept of the Islamic state as an ideological organization: and this is a point which must always be borne in mind if the real purport of this tax is to be understood. In the Islamic state, every able-bodied Muslim is obliged to take up arms in *jihād* (i.e., in a just war in God’s cause) whenever the freedom of his faith or the political safety of his community is imperilled: in other words, every able-bodied Muslim is liable to compulsory military service. Since this is, primarily, a religious obligation, non-Muslim citizens, who do not subscribe to the ideology of Islam, cannot in fairness be expected to assume a similar burden. On the other hand, they must be accorded full protection of all their civic rights and of their religious freedom: and it is in order to compensate the Muslim community for this unequal distribution of civic burdens that a special tax is levied on non-Muslim citizens (*ahl adh-dhimmah*, lit., “covenanted” [or “protected”] people”, i.e., non-Muslims whose safety is statutorily assured by the Muslim community). Thus, *jizyah* is no more and no less than an exemption tax in lieu of military service and in compensation for the “covenant of protection” (*dhimmah*) accorded to such citizens by the Islamic state. (The term itself is derived from the verb *jazā*, “he rendered [something] as a satisfaction”, or “as a compensation [in lieu of something else]” – cf. Lane II, 422.) No fixed rate has been set either by the Qur’ān or by the Prophet for this tax; but from all available Traditions it is evident that it is to be considerably lower than the tax called *zakāh* (“the purifying dues”) to which Muslims are liable and which – because it is a specifically Islamic religious duty – is naturally not to be levied on non-Muslims. Only such of the non-Muslim citizens who, if they were Muslims, would be expected to serve in the armed forces of the state are liable to the payment of *jizyah*, provided that they can easily afford it. Accordingly, all non-Muslim citizens whose personal status or condition would automatically free them from the obligation to render military service are statutorily – that is, on the basis of clear-cut ordinances promulgated by the Prophet – exempted from the payment of *jizyah*: (a) all women, (b) males who have not yet reached full maturity, (c) old men, (d) all sick or crippled men, (e) priests and monks. All non-Muslim citizens who volunteer for military service are obviously exempted from the payment of *jizyah*. My rendering of the expression *‘an yad* (lit., “out of hand”) as “with a willing hand”, that is, without reluctance, is based on one of several explanations offered by Zamakhsharī in his commentary on the above verse. Rashīd Riḍā’, taking the word *yad* in its metaphorical significance of “power” or “ability”, relates the phrase *‘an yad* to the financial ability of the person liable to the payment of *jizyah* (see *Manār* X, 342): an interpretation which is undoubtedly justified in view of the accepted definition of this tax.

22:39 PERMISSION [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged⁵⁷ – and, verily, God has indeed the power to succour them –: (22:40) those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, “Our Sustainer is God!”

For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another,⁵⁸ [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques – in [all of] which God’s name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed [ere now].⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Lit., “inasmuch as they have been wronged”. Connecting with the promise, in the preceding] verse, that “God will ward off [all evil] from those who attain to faith”, the present verse enunciates the permission to fight physically in self-defence. All relevant Traditions (quoted, particularly, by Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr) show that this is the earliest Qur’ānic reference to the problem of war as such. According to ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, it was revealed immediately after the Prophet left Mecca for Medina, i.e., at the beginning of the year 1 H. The principle of war in self-defence – and only in self-defence – has been further elaborated in *Al-Baqarah*, which was revealed about a year later (see 2:190–193 and the corresponding notes).

⁵⁸ Lit., “were it not that God repels some people by means of others” (cf. the identical phrase in the second paragraph of 2:251).

⁵⁹ The implication is that the defence of religious freedom is the foremost cause for which arms may and, indeed, must – be taken up (see 2:193 and the corresponding note 170), or else, as stressed in the concluding clause of 2:251, “corruption would surely overwhelm the earth”.

2:190 AND FIGHT in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression – for, verily, God does not love aggressors.¹⁶⁷ (2:191) And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away – for oppression is even worse than killing.¹⁶⁸ And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first;¹⁶⁹ but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth.

2:192 But if they desist – behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.

2:193 Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone;¹⁷⁰ but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [wilfully] do wrong.

2:194 Fight during the sacred months if you are attacked:¹⁷¹ for a violation of sanctity is [subject to the law of] just retribution. Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you – but remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ This and the following verses lay down unequivocally that only self-defence (in the widest sense of the word) makes war permissible for Muslims. Most of the commentators agree in that the expression *lā ta'tadū* signifies, in this context, “do not commit aggression”; while by *al-mu'tadīn* “those who commit aggression” are meant. The defensive character of a fight “in God's cause” – that is, in the cause of the ethical principles ordained by God – is, moreover, self-evident in the reference to “those who wage war against you”, and has been still further clarified in 22:39 – “permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged” – which, according to all available Traditions, constitutes the earliest (and therefore fundamental) Qur'ānic reference to the question of *jihād*, or holy war (see Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their commentaries on 22:39). That this early, fundamental principle of self-defence as the only possible justification of war has been maintained throughout the Qur'ān is evident from 60:8, as well as from the concluding sentence of 4:91, both of which belong to a later period than the above verse.

¹⁶⁸ In view of the preceding ordinance, the injunction “slay them wherever you may come upon them” is valid only within the context of hostilities already in progress (Rāzī), on the understanding that “those who wage war against you” are the aggressors or oppressors (a war of liberation being a war “in God's cause”). The translation, in this context, of *fitnah*

as “oppression” is justified by the application of this term to any affliction which may cause man to go astray and to lose his faith in spiritual values (cf. *Lisān al-‘Arab*).

169 This reference to warfare in the vicinity of Mecca is due to the fact that at the time of the revelation of this verse the Holy City was still in the possession of the pagan Quraysh, who were hostile to the Muslims. However – as is always the case with historical references in the Qur’ān – the above injunction has a general import, and is valid for all times and circumstances.

170 Lit., “and religion belongs to God [alone]” – i.e., until God can be worshipped without fear of persecution, and none is compelled to bow down in awe before another human being. (See also 22:40.) The term *dīn* is in this context more suitably translated as “worship” inasmuch as it comprises here both the doctrinal and the moral aspects of religion: that is to say, man’s faith as well as the obligations arising from that faith.

171 This is a free rendering of the phrase “the sacred month for the sacred month”, which is interpreted by all commentators in the sense given above. The “sacred months” during which, according to ancient Arab custom, all fighting was deemed utterly wrong, were the first, seventh, eleventh and twelfth months of the lunar calendar.

172 Thus, although the believers are enjoined to fight back whenever they are attacked, the concluding words of the above verse make it clear that they must, when fighting, abstain from all atrocities, including the killing of non-combatants.

60:8 As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity:⁹ for, verily, God loves those who act equitably.

60:9 God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of [your] faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid [others] in driving you forth: and as for those [from among you] who turn towards them in friendship; it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers!

⁹ The expression “God does not forbid you” implies in this context a positive exhortation (Zamakhsharī). See also note 29 on 58:22.

2:256 THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith.²⁴⁹ Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil²⁵⁰ and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

²⁴⁹ The term *dīn* denotes both the contents of and the compliance with a morally binding law; consequently, it signifies “religion” in the widest sense of this term, extending over all that pertains to its doctrinal contents and their practical implications, as well as to man’s attitude towards the object of his worship, thus comprising also the concept of “faith”. The rendering of *dīn* as “religion”, “faith”, “religious law” or “moral law” (see note 3 on 109:6) depends on the context in which this term is used. – On the strength of the above categorical prohibition of coercion (*ikrāh*) in anything that pertains to faith or religion, all Islamic jurists (*fuqahāʾ*), without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin: a verdict which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of “conversion or the sword”.

²⁵⁰ *Aṭ-ṭāghūt* denotes, primarily, anything that is worshipped instead of God and, thus, all that may turn man away from God and lead him to evil. It has both a singular and a plural significance (*Rāzī*) and is, therefore, best rendered as “the powers of evil”.

4:91 You will find [that there are] others who would like to be safe from you as well as safe from their own folk, [but who,] whenever they are faced anew with temptation to evil, plunge into it headlong.¹¹² Hence, if they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them: for it is against these that We have clearly empowered you [to make war].¹¹³

¹¹² Lit., “whenever they are returned to temptation (*fitnah*), they are thrown back into it” or “thrown headlong into it”.

¹¹³ Lit., “that We have given you clear authority (*sulṭān*)” – a solemn reiteration of the ordinance which permits war only in self-defence (cf. 2:190 ff. as well as the corresponding notes).

Source

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